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# Lighted Tractor Parade Now a Tradition

## Christmas-Light-Covered Tractors Swarm Pennsylvania Town

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By Joel Reichenberger , Progressive Farmer Senior Editor



Chad Loucks rolls through downtown Linesville, Pennsylvania, in his elaborately lit John Deere 8100 tractor during the 11th annual Linesville Tractor Parade. The event attracts nearly 100 Christmas-light-decorated tractors ranging from field machines to lawn mowers. (DTN photo by Joel Reichenberger)

LINESVILLE, Pa. (DTN) -- The hard part wasn't getting the cow on the roof of the tractor.

The hard part was to get it to stay there.

Robert Hanna balanced precariously atop the tire of his John Deere 6140D tractor on Dec. 6 as he fussed to get the nylon sack and the small fan strapped in and set up just right.

"You're going to love this," he said to nearby onlookers.

He flipped a switch, the fan blew, the nylon began to take shape and his bovine tractor-topper expanded into the quickly approaching dusk. The Christmas-themed cow yard inflatable caught the faintest of green glows from the thousands of lights that decorated Hanna's tractor, and with its rise, his entry in the annual Linesville, Pennsylvania, Tractor Parade was nearly complete.

Moments later, diesel engines cranked to life, and soon the procession of 96 tractors, decorated from hood to hitch with all sorts of Christmas ornamentation, started their short, single-file journey through the small town, bringing a spectacular display to the thousands who lined the streets for one of the most unique holiday celebrations going.

"I just love doing it," Hanna said. "It's something out of the ordinary. I've got so much going on, but it's a nice break."

For those who participate, the parade has, in its 11 years, become a can't-miss event, as wrapped in tradition and pride as are their tractors with twinkling Christmas lights.

Hanna has driven annually in the parade since 2017, and he's often lit up the night even more than he did this year.

He wrapped 36,000 lights around a pull-type forage harvester and silage wagon one year. Another time, he staged nine small lawn tractors in front of a light-wrapped school bus. When Santa Claus crawled through the top fire escape on the bus and grabbed onto two light-laden reins, it looked like nine reindeer pulling a sleigh.

But life at the Hanna dairy hasn't been the same since fire ripped through the main milking barn last year. The farm is on the road to recovery -- the hope is to finish building a new barn by the summer of 2026 -- but as the work there intensified, some things had to be scaled back.

"I wanted to do it a lot bigger this year, but it's been so hectic trying to get the barn done and get everything in," Hanna said. "I still really wanted to do it, though. It's one of those things."

A STORY FOR EVERY TRACTOR

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The event has become one of "those things" for many farmers in the area.

Linesville is a small town (population of 961 in the last census) in the far northwest corner of Pennsylvania, about 5 miles from Ohio and 20 from Lake Erie.

The parade started with a half-dozen lawnmowers taking to the streets in 2014, but it's grown quickly since and has drawn as many as 120 tractors in a year. As many as 8,000 fans line up along the streets to see the parade, many arriving hours before the first tractor, some around bonfires, to take in the spectacle.

Most of those drivers come back every December, and they all strive to bring their own twist on their machines, which range from large field tractors to small riding lawn mowers.

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The four brothers of the Uber family grew up on a nearby dairy. That motivated them to use the parade as a platform to promote dairy, and they now bring 3,000 bottles of chocolate milk and bags full of cheese sticks to hand out along the parade route. It's become such a signature of the event that viewers who tune into the event's online livestream make a point to do so with a glass of chocolate milk in hand.

Now the brothers do the event every year in honor of their mother, Debbie Uber, who encouraged them to participate in the parade initially. It was always one of her favorite events and marked one of the last times the family was together before she died four years ago, on Christmas Eve during the COVID-19 pandemic.

"She told us we should do this," Tom Uber said. "That got my wheels turning, and I thought about making it a dairy promotion. It evolved from there."

They strung lights from a 1953 John Deere 70, then had family members handing out milk from crates stacked high on a hay trailer as they moved down the road.

Luke Peffer piloted one of the older tractors at the event, a 1935 John Deere Model B. His great-grandfather first brought it home to the farm seven decades ago, and it still sees occasional use outside of parade duty. Peffer always comes with close friend Jake Andrew, who drove a rebuilt, well-lit International Farmall 806, the same model his grandfather owned.

Wesley Evans drove a CaseIH 7120 tractor, and that he was driving it was a point of pride. Evans is just 16 years old but has been decorating a tractor for the parade for four years already. This run was the first in which he was legally allowed to drive his own tractor, so he put in some extra effort.

He got help from his grandparents and family friends, and spent about a week working in the shed, five or six hours a day after school, to wrap his tractor and a trailer with another smaller tractor loaded on board.

"There's a lot more going on this year than usual," he said. "I bought a bunch of these thin rope lights, and when you wrap them around the trailer, it makes the ground glow, too."

#### MAKING THE MOST OF EVERY BULB

Every farmer has learned some tricks of the parade.

Power for all those lights (and inflatable cows) is the first concern.

Some seek out battery-powered lights from online retailers, while others mount small gas-powered generators on their tractors or the towed trailers and run the lights from them.

Evans said the key to getting good Christmas-light cover on the slippery hood of a tractor is to first wrap it in an elastic cargo net, then weave the lights into the net.

Chad Loucks, who rolled out one of the most brightly lit tractors of the event, said he's learned a lot since he started participating in the event's third year.

This year, he covered his John Deere 8100 tractor with thousands of green lights, but, importantly, he said, also some red and white ones.

"The biggest thing is if you have a green tractor, put green lights on it, red tractor, red lights. It helps reflect better," he said. "The other thing, I really like the details, so I put some red lights on my slow-moving sign. I try to make it realistic."

Making it realistic includes one strand of white lights to account for the stripe of yellow running along the front end of a Deere tractor, and white lights around the windows to add just a little extra definition and shape.

One more little trick: He doesn't confine his lights on the tires to the metal hubs of the wheels. He runs battery-powered lights around the outer edge of the outside tire on his duals, stapling into the lugs. Then, squeezing in to get access, he runs another strand around the inside tire.

"People don't always think of that," he said.

Still, the show-stealer for his rig wasn't any of that. It was the 12-foot corn cob his tractor towed on a trailer.

That was the product of his sister, Ann Meader, who, along with her family, cut down a 3-foot-tall culvert pipe to act as the core. They painted 675 milk jugs yellow, then added LED lights and attached all the jugs with wire and staples.

"It seems crazy that in this wild world we live in, you can put Christmas lights on your tractor and drive through town and put that many smiles on faces," Loucks said. "Different families have different traditions. The tractor parade happens to be ours."

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